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# Presidential Campaigns

By Phyllis Naegeli

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What does an individual have to do to win the highest office in our country? The **campaign** for the presidency begins long before we know who the **candidates** are.

The process involves four stages - deciding to run, gaining the nomination, the party conventions, and the general **election**.

Before a person declares they will run for president, they first weigh the cost. A presidential campaign not only requires large sums of money, but a high personal cost. Candidates must decide if it is worth the toll it will take on their assets, their family, their mental well-being, and their time. Most potential candidates invest a large sum of money in research before deciding to run. They hire experts to conduct polls and determine the odds of winning. If an individual receives a favorable response, they announce their candidacy. This requires placing their name on ballots across the nation. It also requires the support of their political party. In the history of our nation, no candidate has won the presidency without the support from one of the two major **political parties** - today known as Republican and Democratic.

In order to gain a party nomination, candidates must participate in **caucuses** and **primaries**. Each state holds a nominating election. The first primary is held in New Hampshire each presidential election, while the first caucus is held in Iowa. Each of these types of elections gives a candidate delegates to the national party convention.

Primaries are done by secret ballot at a polling location. A caucus is a meeting of party members who vote by voice or by raising their hands.

Once all the primaries and caucuses have been completed, Democrats and Republicans hold their conventions. In our media driven society, we already know the outcome. However, parties hold conventions as a tradition. These events last for four days and are usually held in mid-summer. The first day is filled with speeches, the highlight of which is the **keynote address** in the evening. The speaker chosen for the evening speech is usually a rising star or important political figure. The second day is filled with meetings to form the party's **platform**. The platform consists of individual **planks** on various issues of importance in the upcoming election. On day three, the candidate is officially **nominated**. States are called in alphabetical order to reveal their candidate choice. The people at the convention representing their state are the delegates elected in the primary or caucus. Delegates provide a festive atmosphere by dressing in elaborate hats and clothing to signify their party loyalty. On the final day, the vice-presidential candidate is nominated. Then the two candidates give their acceptance speeches - a media covered event.

The general election campaigning usually begins sometime after Labor Day. The major party candidates square off in a "battle for the White House." They travel around the country and make speeches. Campaign workers pass out buttons, yard signs, and bumper stickers. Polls are conducted on a regular basis to find out who is ahead in the race. The presidential candidates debate each other, as do the vice-presidential candidates. Political **advertisements** saturate the airwaves. It becomes a media circus right down to Election Day -- the Tuesday on or after November 2.

When voters cast their ballot in the general election, they choose electors who will vote for their candidate. Each state has electors equal to the number of congressional representatives they have. In December, after the general election, electors meet in their state capitals and cast their vote - this is called the Electoral College. These results are certified by the state and sent to Congress. The day after the election, we know who has won. However, one final step must occur. In January, the Congress meets to make the final declaration of who will be president. The president is then sworn into office on January 20, Inauguration Day.

Every four years, our country chooses its leader. The campaign is a long, involved process. It takes a tremendous toll on the life and resources of a candidate, and the people of this country. Yet, it is important to remember that this process has worked well for over two-hundred years.

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### Questions

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1. In what order do the four stages of a presidential campaign take place?

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- A. deciding to run
- B. the general election
- C. the nomination phase
- D. the party convention

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Which of the following does a person consider before running for president? (choose all that apply)

- A. the personal cost
- B. who the vice-president will be
- C. the financial cost
- D. their chances of winning

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. In our history, only one candidate has won the presidency without the support of a major political party.

- A. false
- B. true

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. What do candidates do to gain the nomination from their political party?

- A. attend the national party convention
- B. participate in debates
- C. participate in caucuses and primaries
- D. convince delegates to support them

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Which state holds the nation's first primary?

- A. Iowa
- B. New Hampshire
- C. Indiana
- D. New Jersey

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. What happens on the final day of a convention? (Choose all that apply)

- A. the two candidates give their acceptance speeches
- B. the party platform is decided
- C. the vice-president is officially nominated
- D. the presidential candidate is nominated

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. During the general election phase, polls are conducted to see who is ahead in the race.

- A. false
- B. true

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. Who makes the final declaration of who will be president?

- A. Congress
- B. the current president
- C. state legislators
- D. the Senate